

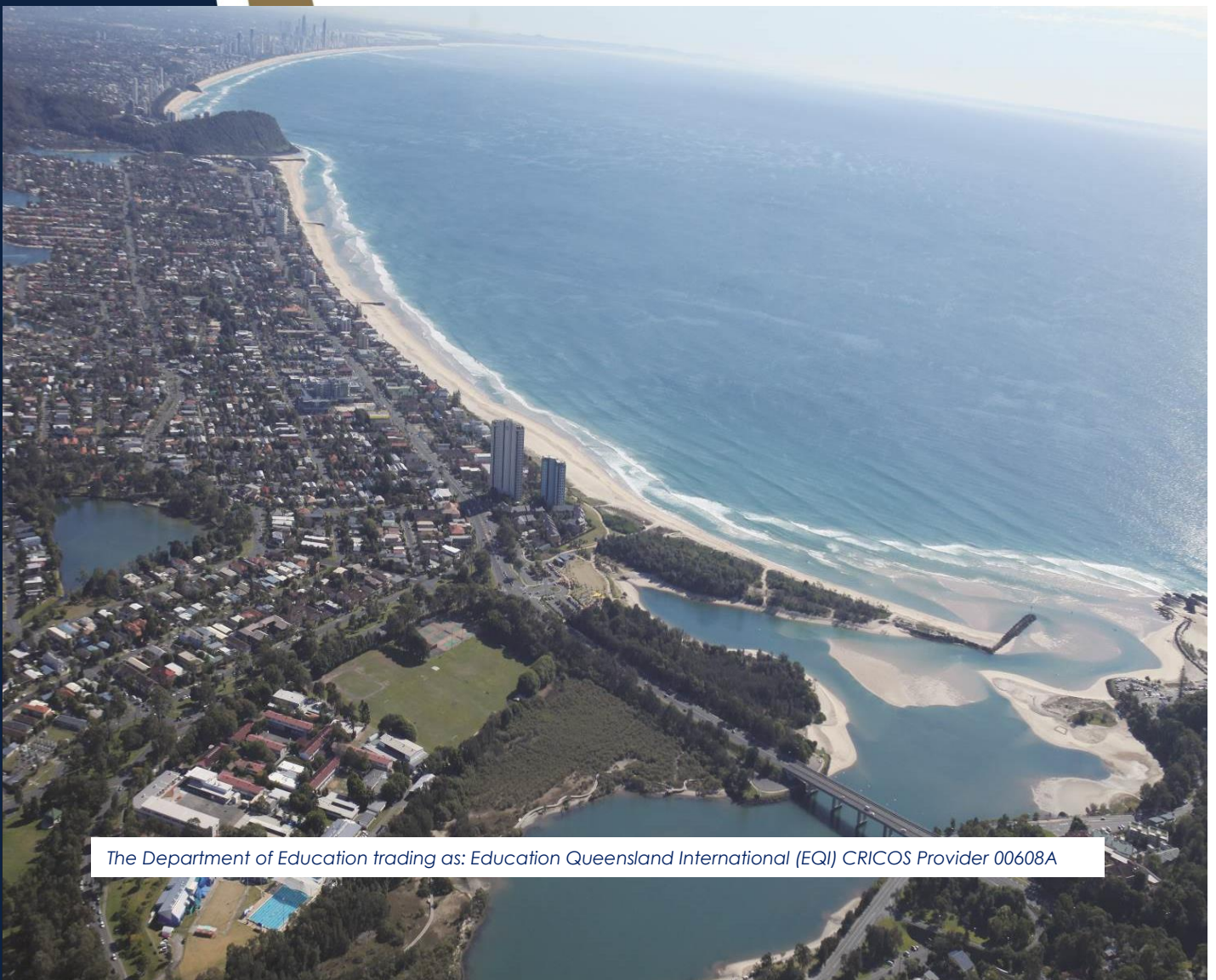


PALM BEACH  
CURRUMBIN  

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STATE HIGH

**INTERNATIONAL STUDENT PROGRAM  
HOMESTAY FAMILY INFORMATION BOOKLET**



*The Department of Education trading as: Education Queensland International (EQI) CRICOS Provider 00608A*



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## Welcome to the International Student and Homestay Program

Homestay is one of the best options for enabling International students to integrate into the Australian way of life. It allows the students to enjoy a cultural exchange and activities, while improving their English Language. Your family will benefit by learning about your student's culture, country and way of life.

Palm Beach Currumbin State High hosts many international students from a wide variety of countries. Our International students stay for varying lengths of time, from 3 months to 3 years although the majority stay for 6 months.

We also cater for study groups who may stay from one day to 4 weeks.

A good homestay experience will remain with your student throughout their lives and your support assists them to overcome any issues with homesickness, cultural and language differences.

We ask that you treat your student as one of the family and are not looked upon as visitors. Assimilation into the host family is a cultural benefit to both the student and his/her new family. It is the responsibility of the host families to make students feel part of their family by encouraging students to participate in family events, outings etc. Host families are expected to provide leisure activities suitable for the age of students staying with them. Students are to be suitably supervised during their stay with the host family in a manner deemed appropriate for the age of the student. Never look upon the student as anything other than your adopted son or daughter

Palm Beach Currumbin State High cannot guarantee placement of student/s in your home on a continual basis. We also have no control if a student placed with you cancels their trip to Australia or changes plans. In this case we will attempt to place another student with you, depending on availability. As some hosts are registered with other schools or agencies we ask that you have no more than two International students at one time and certainly not more than one of a particular nationality. This can be flexible in cases of extreme emergency or for short periods.

Palm Beach Currumbin State High conducts Homestay Orientation Sessions twice a year. It is important to attend these as we discuss issues pertinent to your role as a host family.

Hosting international students can be a very rewarding experience. We look forward to having you involved in our homestay program and ensuring that our students have a great experience in Australia.





## DUTY OF CARE



Education Queensland International (EQI) has in place appropriate policies and guidelines to ensure the safety and welfare of International students whilst studying in Australia. Homestay families are required to follow these policies and guidelines when hosting students. Education Queensland International has the students' welfare and is legally responsible for them.

The host family is one of the most important aspects of the student's time in Australia and therefore great care is taken to ensure appropriate placements are made.

It is expected that students will be placed in a safe, caring family environment. It is important that the students feel included and part of the family. Host families are asked to provide encouragement and support towards their students during difficult times of adjustments, for their academic studies and general wellbeing.

We ask that host families are sensitive towards the student's cultural background and respect the many differences that may occur. Language difficulties may be an issue and therefore suggest that you show patience and encourage communication with your students whenever possible, as this will help build rapport and trust. Please make sure you ask questions to ensure the student understands and do not assume anything.

## EXPECTATIONS

It is important in the early days of a student's arrival for host families to discuss the student expectations of their time in Australia. It is also recommended at this time for the host families to go through their expectations of their student within their family environment and house rules.

Be clear about your expectations so that the student knows what is required of them to avoid confusion.

EQI have in place a Standard Terms and Conditions for International Students and a Terms and Conditions for Homestay Providers to assist families with this process. Please refer to these as necessary.

## SUPPORT

Occasionally a problem may arise with your student which may not be resolved through mediation and in these circumstances we advise that you contact our International Department.

Please contact the International Student Coordinator Corinne Van Put – 0438 191 637 during business hours or **call 1800QSTUDY (1800 778 839) after hours.**

Leave a message if phone is unattended and your call will be returned as soon as possible.



## BLUE CARD



Since 1 May 2002, the screening of persons delivering services in specific categories of child related employment (i.e. homestay accommodation) is compulsory. This is mandated under the Commission for Children and Young People Child Guardian Act 2000.

The Commission aims to promote and protect the rights, interests and wellbeing of all children and young people in Queensland. This legislation requires people who want to work/host in a child related employment (that is paid employees, volunteers or people in child related businesses including homestay) to apply for a Working with Children Check or Blue Card. The Working with Children Check is a criminal history check. The Commission assesses each person's suitability on the basis of their criminal history. People deemed unsuitable will be prohibited from working with children.

EQI requires all homestay parents and other persons residing in the household over 18 years of age to complete this check. International Department staff at school may assist prospective homestay families to complete this process. Application process along with additional details can be obtained from the Commission's website - <https://www.bluecard.qld.gov.au/applications/applications.html>

Phone the Blue Card Contact Centre on 3111 6999 or 1800 113 611 (Free call). Proof of a current Blue Card must be provided to the International Student Coordinator prior to a student placement being confirmed.

When you receive your Blue Card please forward a copy to International Student Services.

If your application for a Blue Card is denied please contact Corinne Van Put on 5525 9394.

## RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGY



All our homestay providers are required to identify and evaluate potential harm to children and young people in their care. Hosts must have in place a written risk management strategy that complies with the new regulation.

This needs to be updated yearly.

Homestay family must:

- implement homestay policy and procedures;
- obtain a Working with Children Check (Blue Card) before hosting any international students;
- attend school homestay functions wherever possible;
- ensure that students are protected from harm wherever they can;
- ensure that students have a quality experience during their time in Queensland;
- obtain approval from the school for any high risk events;
- report any reasonable suspicion of harm towards a student to the school and relevant authorities;
- maintain relevant records of school and EQI procedures
- maintain relevant records of any reports of incidents that may have occurred.



## INSURANCE

Homestay arrangements may not be covered by normal insurance. The homestay family is responsible for ensuring that additional insurance is arranged to cover any damage (accidental or otherwise) or other costs that may be caused by the student. There are two types of insurances that affect an international student in homestay (referred to as a 'non related resident')

- Public Liability Insurance and
- Contents Insurance

It is recommended that homestay families have insurance to mitigate these circumstances.

The family should contact their own Insurance Company and ask for confirmation of the information from a Supervisor or Team Leader (Home Underwriter Division). Keep a copy of the name of the Supervisor, the date and time of the call. Please check with your insurer for the policy that best suits your situation.

It is the responsibility of international students and their families to insure any valuable items the student might bring with them to Australia. This can be arranged by taking out travel insurance for the duration of their travel to and from their home country. Particular items of value may need to be specified separately.

## INCOME TAX



Host families should be informed to check with their taxation accountant or check the ATO website [www.ato.gov.au](http://www.ato.gov.au) regarding the tax implications of payments received under a homestay arrangement. If a family hosts more than two students the ATO may require an ABN number. Please check the tax implications for your individual circumstances with the ATO.

## HOMESTAY PAYMENTS

Your homestay payments are paid fortnightly one week in advance and one week in arrears. The weekly amount is \$320.00 in 2022 and will increase to \$328.00 in 2023. Hosts must sign an EFT form (included in information pack) before a payment can be deposited into your account. You must notify us in writing if your bank details change.

From time to time for various reasons students may change host families. Students are required to give you two weeks' notice of relocation. We will endeavour to move the students to coincide with the fortnightly pay period. If the decision is made to relocate the student immediately you may still receive two weeks payment. Please note each case will be decided on its own circumstances.

Should a student relocate during a payment cycle, you may be required to refund the school any overpayments of funds paid to you. Should this occur, PBC school administration staff will contact you.

Families who are hosting students over the summer holiday period may find their student travelling away or returning home during the break. In this case homestay families are entitled to a \$56.00 holding deposit for each week the student is not residing with them. This money is funded by the students and is not included in the homestay funds we receive. Please discuss this with your student as soon as you are aware of their travel plans. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please contact Corinne Van Put (International Student Coordinator) 0438 191 637 during business hours.

## ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE OF STUDENTS

Prior to the student arriving in Australia you must:

- Read through the Student Information provided to you by International Student Coordinator
- Reply to student/s as soon as they contact you





- If unable to contact student/s let the International Student Coordinator know
- Ensure your contact details are correct
- Natural parents need reassurance about who is hosting their child
- If contact is not made it can jeopardise your ability to host students

On arrival please give to your international student their information package. This package includes enrolment form which you must complete, a student handbook, uniform information, emergency details card and Standard Terms and Conditions. We ask that you read through the information package with your student shortly after their arrival. The completed and signed Enrolment form must be returned to PBC the day your student attends the orientation.

We organise airport pickup for students and we deliver them to your door. In cases where large groups of students arrive at one time you may be asked to meet and welcome your student at Palm Beach Currumbin State High. If you would like to collect your student from the airport please contact Corinne Van Put on (0438 191 637) during business hours.

Please arrange to have someone available to greet the student on their first day and possibly to stay with them if you are unable to be there. Although they may be jet-lagged and wish to sleep, they will feel more comfortable on waking if they know you are there for support.

Shortly after the students' arrival please show them the bus route, the location of the school, the beach, local shopping centre and any other destinations they may need. It is a good idea to investigate bus timetables before their arrival and a great idea to travel the route with them on their first trip. Hosts often organise a day trip around the coast (eg the Hinterland) to familiarise the student with the area.

Some students may need to exchange currency or open bank accounts. It is appreciated if you take the time to assist them.

On the first day of school, it is of benefit that the host brings the student to school to enable them to settle in easier. You will also be required to sign enrolment forms.

### **Departures**

After hosting your student and it's time for them to depart it is often a very emotional time. They have mixed emotions about staying and also wanting to see their parents back home. It is an expectation that host families will transport their student to the airport at the end of their stay.

If this is not possible due to work commitments, you are expected to arrange and pay for a door-to-door airport bus. We prefer that your student does not travel alone by train.

### **HOME-SICKNESS**

Be aware that at some time during their stay, your student will possibly experience some home sickness. This normally occurs around the third or fourth week after arrival although it may differ for each student. We ask that you watch for any signs of sadness, melancholy or detachment from the family and give some extra attention to your student at this time. Encourage your student to talk about any problems they may have. This builds a trusting relationship between you. However, if the situation does not improve, the homestay family should contact the International Student Coordinator who will arrange a meeting with the Guidance Officer at the school.

### **CULTURE ADJUSTMENT**

Cultural Adjustment or 'Culture Shock' has been described as disorientation and a feeling of being overwhelmed by the differences experienced in another culture. Symptoms of culture shock can be both



physical (sleep disturbances, eating problems, and frequent illnesses) and psychological (severe homesickness, loneliness, boredom, isolation, hostility, withdrawal).

	<b>At Home</b>	<b>1st Month</b>	<b>2nd Month</b>	<b>3rd Month</b>	<b>4th &amp; 5th Month</b>	<b>6th Month</b>
<b>Possible feelings</b>	Anticipation	Exhilaration & anxiety	Restlessness & impatience	Discouragement & irritability	Gradual improvement of mood	Normal feelings
<b>Significant events</b>	Planning, packing, partying & saying good-bye	New housing, school, sights, shops, orientation, classes begin	Beginning of classes, unfamiliar language, food & smells	Cut down or stop language study, look for familiar recreation, midterm grades	Acceptable class performance, final exams	Normal class performance new term begins
<b>Possible emotional reactions</b>	Excitement, enthusiasm, fear of the unknown, concern about leaving family	Tourist enthusiasm	Uncertainty, anger, withdrawal, increase in unhealthy behaviours	Discouragement, bewilderment, concern about sanitation, missing home	Interest in new culture or acceptance of differences	Balance of likes & dislikes
<b>Possible attitudes &amp; behaviour all responses to events</b>	Anticipation, loss of interest in current activities at home	Curiosity about Australians, enthusiasm for classes/colleagues	Suspicious, frustrated & questioning values of self & others	Avoid contact with local people, become hostile & or fearful, stereotyping people	Constructive attitudes & accommodations	Balanced attitudes
<b>Possible physical responses to events</b>	Fatigue	Stomach ache & sleeplessness	Colds, headaches, stomach aches	Minor illnesses (cold or flu)	Improved health	Normal health

Adapted from "Culture Shock - Stages & Symptoms" International Centre, University of Michigan.





## SHOPPING AND FOOD



It is recommended that host families take their student shopping to purchase items they like to eat. It is important the student is involved in this process so that the host family is aware of what to purchase on a regular basis.

You are expected to supply three meals a day and have available suitable snacks for between meals. This can consist of fruit, biscuits, crackers, cheese, muesli bars, yoghurt and other appropriate items the student might like to eat.

Students are expected to buy their own junk food or soft drinks. They are also expected to purchase their own toiletries. Toilet paper and soap should be supplied by the host family.

The amount of food a student eats varies from student to student. Please take the time to discuss what your student wants to eat for breakfast and lunch. A variety of food should be on offer for your student to have and they should be able to make their own breakfast and lunch. That includes having cereal, toast, muesli, cooking a hot breakfast or preparing salads/ wraps/ sandwiches or taking leftovers for lunch. Please explain to your student that some foods are for lunch/dinner preparation and are not to be eaten as snacks. Ensure the same rules apply for both your student and your own children.

It is imperative that your student has sufficient amounts of food everyday as host families are being remunerated for this cost. Remember everyone's eating habits are different. Restricting what a student eats or not providing the healthy food they like will most probably cause them to complain which may result in the student requesting to be moved to another host family. A student should not go hungry.

You are not expected to prepare traditional /specialised meals for your students from their home countries however if you choose to do so occasionally this will be appreciated by the student. They are usually very happy to teach you some of their recipes.

We need to remember we all have food dislikes and some students are not used to eating the way we do. It will take a while for them to adjust to our meal times and eating habits. It is important you consider this when hosting and be flexible.

## WASHING AND CLEANING



The student is to be treated as a member of the family and is expected to clean up after themselves. They should be encouraged to make their bed and keep their room tidy. Most hosts wash their student's clothes with the family wash. If you prefer not to wash their clothes you should discuss this with the student.

Some cultures do not wash socks or underwear with other clothes, as these items are considered "unclean". Often the student will prefer to wash their own underwear.

Ironing is also something to be discussed with the student, remembering that some students have never used an iron. It is a good idea to give them a lesson before they attempt this chore. Explain to students that wet clothing is not to be hung in their bedrooms. This often happens when students hand wash their underwear whilst showering.

If you both agree to the student doing their own washing and/or ironing please explain how to use the washing machine and iron.



## PERSONAL HYGIENE



Students from other cultures may feel unsure or uncomfortable talking to you about this. Please be open from the start.

Some cultures stand or squat on the toilet seat rather than sit, some dispose of toilet paper in a bin rather than the toilet bowl, some do not use toilet paper but use water to wash themselves.

Some cultures do not stand under the shower but wash themselves on the bathroom tiles, sometimes causing a pool of water. If this is happening in your home ask the student to wipe the floor and bench tops after themselves. It is a good idea to supply a cloth in the bathroom for this purpose.

Please explain to girls how to dispose of tampons etc. They are often too shy to ask.

Some cultures believe sniffing is more hygienic than using a tissue or handkerchief. Gently explain that this is considered impolite in Australia.

Spitting is also considered acceptable in some cultures.

Above all, use tact when explaining the differences, whilst remembering that they are differences. Never imply that our culture is correct.

## PRIVACY

Respect for the student's privacy is as important as your need to retain your privacy. Advise your children that they are not to infringe and are to seek the students' permission to enter the student's bedroom.

To avoid any problems it is recommended that the family members do not enter the students' bedroom when student is absent.

## CURFEWS



EQI and the Alliance between the schools on the Gold Coast have set curfew times which they feel are appropriate for the students who come to Australia. EQI curfews are as follows:

### Students in Year 11 & 12:

- Sunday – Thursday                      Dinner time – 7:00pm
- Friday and Saturday                      10:30pm

### Students in Year 7 – 10:

- Sunday – Thursday                      Dinner time – 6:00pm
- Friday and Saturday                      9:30pm

Homestay families should notify the International Student Coordinator if the curfews are not being observed. The students will serve detentions at school if this occurs.

The curfew times on the holidays remain the same. It is at your discretion as the host parent to re-negotiate the curfew time for the holiday period. Likewise if your student is wishing to travel to Brisbane to attend a concert or special event (not an everyday thing) it is ok for you to extend the curfew to fit in with the bus/train times due to the finish time of the event.

Remember that they are in strange surroundings and may not realise the dangers of being out too late at any time. Please be aware that students should not be walking or riding their bike late at night. Students should make arrangements to catch a taxi (at student's expense) or Uber or you organise to collect them from the bus stop etc.



Please remember you must be able to contact your student at all times. It is also advisable to give them your contact numbers so they can contact you should the need arise (they miss the bus etc). If your student is visiting another family please obtain the name and contact number for that family before your student goes.

We expect Homestay families to enforce curfews with their students. If we find that host families are not following this rule we may remove the student from that host family and be very reluctant to place students with them in the future.

## OUTINGS



If you are going out, encourage the student to join you – however make sure they know when they must pay for it. Students appreciate being taken to visit local sights and explore their surroundings. It is natural for them to want to see where they are living and it is an expectations that host families make an effort to share this with them. If you are taking the student to a theme park the student should pay. If you are going out eg, a restaurant or having take away for a meal which you would otherwise provide, then the host should pay.

## TRANSPORT COSTS



Students are expected to pay their own public transport costs although some hosts offer to pay for part of the costs if they live some distance from the school. This is your decision.

Most International students find our bus and train fares expensive compared to their countries. As non-taxpayers, they are not eligible for free bus passes. If your student travels to school each day by bus, please assist them to purchase a Go Card.

If your student is travelling by taxi, please let them know to take note of the taxi number which is located on the windscreen or door in case they are overcharged. If this happens you can call Taxi Complaints on 5588 1299, it may be useful for students to use their emergency contact cards with your address details if they have communication difficulties.

At no time should you ask your student for petrol money. This is included in the remuneration you receive from PBC.

If your student purchases a bicycle please explain the need to lock the bike and our laws in regard to helmets. If you choose to lend one of your own bikes to your student, please discuss who is responsible if the bike is stolen or damaged whilst in the care of the student. Or you can “sell” the bike to the student and then return the money if the bike is returned in good condition at the end of the student's stay. Keep in mind the large amount of bikes stolen (even when locked) on the Gold Coast. Be sure to explain this to the student.



## HOLIDAYS / TRAVEL



We encourage you to include your student when organising a family holiday. Students who wish to travel must fill in a Travel and Activity form which needs to be signed by the host family, natural parents and Principal.

The form should be handed to the International Student Coordinator at least two weeks before planned travel to enable us to process the travel information including obtaining the signature of the natural parents.

The school will not authorise any student travel unless the student is accompanied by a responsible adult over the age of 21, their host family or relative. Travel Forms are to be signed by the host family, the student, the natural parents and the principal. Copies of this form are included in this information booklet. **Host families must contact the person the student has nominated to look after them during their travel to ensure the details and arrangements are correct.**

### SLEEP OVER

Students must complete the **Travel and Activity Form** when they wish to stay overnight with a friend. E.g. weekend sleepovers. This form must be completed and signed by the homestay and returned for approval by the International Student Coordinator. If your student wishes to sleep over at the same friend's house several times the form only needs to be completed once. Each time they wish to stay at a different friend's house a new form must be completed.

**Please Note: It is the homestay families' responsibility to contact the other family to confirm the sleep over arrangements before the student stays over.**

**Do not sign the Travel and Activity form if you have not confirmed the arrangements.**

### TRAVEL AWAY FORM

Students must complete the **Travel and Activities Request Form** (Appendix 1) whenever they wish to travel outside the local area (e.g. travelling to Sydney, Melbourne, Cairns, Sunshine Coast etc or on an organised tour). Students are to complete and obtain homestay signature on the form and return it to the International Student Coordinator at least two weeks before travel commences, along with a travel itinerary.

**Please Note: It is the homestay families' responsibility to contact the other family to confirm the travel arrangements before the student travels.**

**Please document the name, address and phone number of the family.**

Students are not allowed to travel outside Australia whilst on a student visa, unless accompanied by their natural parents, homestay parents (must have natural parents' permission) or are flying home for the holidays. A Travel and Activity Form must be filled in and handed to International Student Coordinator.

If your student is holidaying with you they are expected to pay their transport and accommodation costs although this is entirely up to you. Some hosts pay all or part of the costs for their student. You would be required to supply meals whilst you are away as you would if at home.

If you are travelling away and your student doesn't accompany you, you may make alternative arrangements for your student's accommodation or if you are unable to do this please contact Corinne Van Put who will assist with the arrangements. **Your student MUST NOT be left on their own overnight at anytime.**



You are required to pay the temporary homestay family the current daily rate of pay for homestay. Please check with the International Student Coordinator for the current rate.

## TELEPHONE



Students are expected to have their own mobile phones when they arrive. They can purchase a pre-paid phone card from newsagents, service stations and most supermarkets.

Please assist your student in purchasing a SIM card when they arrive to avoid expensive calls from their mobiles.

You can research pre-paid phone cards at [www.phonecardselector.com.au](http://www.phonecardselector.com.au)

## INTERNET

Broadband internet is favoured when hosting students. Please talk to your student about your phone/internet rules when they arrive to avoid confrontation or confusion.

You can charge a small fee for the use of your computer/line if your student is using an excessive amount of download. If you do not have internet access students can purchase a mobile internet pre-paid facility by contacting various telecommunication companies.

## STUDENT ABSENCES

Students come to Australia on a student visa. In order to stay in Australia on a student visa the student must attend class 100% of the time unless they are ill. If they are absent for two or more days a medical certificate is required. Students who have unexplained absences will have problems with their school reports when returning home. If students fall below 80% attendance they are at risk of being reported to Department of Home Affairs which may result in the student being deported.

We are obliged to record and report non-attendance to the Qld Education Department who in turn report to the Department of Home Affairs. Your student's attendance is monitored on a regular basis. If there are multiple absences you will receive a letter from PBC outlining the level of non-attendance and the action which will be taken.

All absences are taken into consideration irrespective of reason given. Please report absences to the PBC absence Line [absences@pbc-shs.eq.edu.au](mailto:absences@pbc-shs.eq.edu.au) / **0426 305 728** or Corinne Van Put via phone call, email or write a note to explain their absences.

If you have any queries or issues regarding absences please contact Corinne Van Put on 0438 191 637 or 5525 9394.



## ILLNESS



If your student is ill, encourage them to see a doctor and obtain a medical certificate to present to their form teacher along with a note from you explaining why they were absent from school. **Please, call, text or email the school if your student is going to be absent for the day.**

Student visa holders will have medical insurance, normally through Allianz Global Assistance.

This does not entitle them to private health care. Students are issued with an Allianz Global Assistance Information Pack on arrival. Please request to view this if you need to.

If they need to attend hospital please take them to Tweed Heads or Gold Coast University Hospital. If the student needs to see a doctor they must pay full price for the consultation and then receive their rebate through Allianz Global Assistance.

Students have ambulance cover.

## CRITICAL INCIDENT



A critical incident is defined as a traumatic event or threat of such (within or outside Australia) which does, or is likely to cause, extreme fear, physical and /or emotional distress or injury to staff and or students and may be regarded as outside the normal range of experience of the people affected.

A critical incident may take place at school or outside of school. Therefore the EQI Critical Incident Policy and Procedures are not limited to handling only those incidents that might occur at school.

Please call triple zero (000) to contact Police, Fire or Ambulance in a life threatening or emergency situations and follow the instructions of the emergency services.

**Should a critical incident occur with a student please contact  
Corinne Van Put on 0438 191 637 during business hours or 1800QSTUDY  
(1800 778 839) after hours**

## PROBLEMS

These should be brought to the attention of your student immediately, as leaving things unresolved can lead to further problems and embarrassment for both student and host. Please be open with your student. If there is a problem, talk about it. If it cannot be resolved, contact the International Student Coordinator.

Under no circumstances should homestay families call the students Agent or natural parents about issues or problems. This should always be handled by the International Student Coordinator. If you are in contact with the natural parents please only share positive news with them.



## CHANGE OF STUDENT PLACEMENT



From time to time it may be necessary for students to move homestay. If either the student or homestay family requests a change of placement or the school requires a change of homestay family, the International Student Coordinator will effect this change in accordance with EQI policy.

When a change needs to take place the host family and student should complete the Change of Homestay Request form which is available from the International Student Coordinator.

Both the homestay family and/or the student must give two weeks' notice for a change of homestay placement to occur.

Please do not take the change of homestay personally, we must respect natural parents request and will move students accordingly. **Please do not discuss change of homestay families with any student. There are always two sides to every story and the International Student Coordinator will be in a better position to judge if the change is warranted and which family is better suited to the student.**

## EVALUATION

After the student has been in your home for a short time they will be asked to complete an evaluation form which asks questions about their homestay family, food, friendliness, tidiness etc. If students repeatedly comment on a problem with a particular homestay family, then careful consideration will be given to remove the family from the register.









## Contact Us

### **Palm Beach Currumbin State High School**

Thrower Drive, Palm Beach  
Queensland 4221 Australia  
Locked Mail Bag 1, Currumbin  
Queensland 4223 Australia

Telephone (07) 5525 9333  
[info@pbc-shs.eq.edu.au](mailto:info@pbc-shs.eq.edu.au)  
[www.pbc-shs.eq.edu.au](http://www.pbc-shs.eq.edu.au)

### **Corinne Van Put**

(International Student Coordinator)

PH: 07 5525 9394  
AH: 0438 191 637 during school hours  
EMAIL: [cvanp1@eq.edu.au](mailto:cvanp1@eq.edu.au)

### **ENQUIRIES OR EMERGENCIES (after hours)**

**1800QSTUDY (1800 778 839)**

### **School Book Shop**

Open Monday to Friday  
8:15 – 12.00

PH: 07 5525 9329 (bookshop)

### **School Uniform Shop**

Open Daily  
8:15am – 12:00pm

PH: 07 5525 9331 (uniforms)

### **Surfside Bus lines**

PH: 07 5571 6555 (general enquiries)  
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## Cross-Cultural Misunderstandings in Homestay

By Kathryn Richardson

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Over the last few years I have been researching some of the cultural interactions that happen within homestay households. The introduction of someone from another culture may be exciting, but it can also add dimensions to your family life that you did not expect. On the other hand, if you are a homestay student you might find yourself in a family very different from your own.

In my research [1] I have looked at some of the aspects of homestay that homestay hosts have found interesting, both good and bad. The experiences that hosts mainly talked about included aspects of family life such as family meal times and food. They were surprised about different attitudes toward housework, and quite a few different cultural “unmentionables” were discussed. Homestay hosts also made comment on communication in homestay and their concerns about their privacy and differing cultural ideas about politeness and honesty. If you are a student reading this you might get some ideas to help you understand your homestay host better.

### Evening Meals:

The evening meal is considered an important part of the day for many Australian families. It is a time when the family can communicate with each other about their day. Some homestay hosts expected the students in their care to participate in family mealtime. However, this can sometimes be difficult for some homestay students as one of the hosts explained.

*... a couple of nights ago [my student] said, “Could I have dinner in my room?” And I said, “Sure, that’s okay.” And then an hour or two later, I said, “Do you like having dinner in your room?” She said, “Oh, yes, it’s so much easier. I can relax.” I just said, “well you know, this is a time when we try to all get together because we’re all so busy and this is a time when we talk and you can talk and practice your English.” And she looked at me as though I was weird. So it’s interesting. I think there are so many things that we really don’t understand.*

Homestay students will often feel tired due to the enormous amount of energy they put into communicating everyday. It is very important to recognise the students' need to escape the pressure of communication from time to time.

The homestay hosts found that some students find talking at the dinner table very difficult. In several cultures it is normal for families to eat in silence. One host explained,

*...She said in a lot of Asian countries when they sit down to eat a meal they don't talk. They just sit down and eat. And here we are thinking this meal thing ... and she said, “You’ll actually have to say in Australia we talk ... we eat and this is the time to catch up and to share and it helps your English and so on.” So we’d been going on for about two or three years trying to do this meal thing and we’re struggling to get these kids to talk...*



Another difficulty students might have is they are used to eating out at night with their friends. This can sometimes be difficult for homestay hosts if they expect their student to be home for meal times and the student decides to eat out without informing them. Some hosts have also talked about some cultures, which consider it polite to eat loudly. This can cause embarrassment for the hosts if they are unused to 'eating noises'. It can be important for you as a host and students to communicate about what mealtime traditions they have experienced and what generally occurs in your house and be understanding of the way each culture.

### **Food**

One thing that differs a great deal between cultures is food. Some homestay hosts found it difficult to provide international students with food from their country, while other hosts felt they should try to accommodate the students' need for familiar foods. Since food has such personal and cultural ties, students can sometimes experience physiological symptoms from not having food, which is familiar to them.

In order to accommodate your student's needs with regard to food there are several things you can do. Firstly, you might like to ask your student to cook their favourite meal and teach you how to make it, too. This can create a lot of fun as you learn more about your student's culture. You can also pick up some handy cooking tips and dinner can become a cultural exchange. If your student has a craving for home food, but you can't provide it, it is a good idea to have a list of good restaurants in the near vicinity that would cater for the student's needs. There are some very good Asian and Middle Eastern supermarkets around Melbourne. It might be interesting to take your student shopping to find what they like.

### **Household chores**

Homestay students come from many diverse backgrounds. Some might have grown up with servants to do all the housework; others might come from a background where it is a woman's role to clean; still others might have come from families where everyone helps with the household chores. As one homestay host stated, "Some of [the students] are used to having servants and they literally don't know how to wash a dish." With this in mind, not all students will come into a homestay with the same values as the homestay hosts. Again, it is important that both parties communicate about what happens in each culture and what the host family expects. It is important to bear in mind that some students might initially need help to learn how to do light chores, such as doing dishes and keeping their room tidy.

Some homestay students can be more difficult to persuade to help with household chores. It is important that communication remains open about what is expected. They also might have the perception that they are paying the host for services. This can result in the host feeling more like a servant than a host, especially female homestay hosts. To help overcome this it might help explaining to the student about living standards in Australia and the cost of maintaining those living standards.

### **Dealing with Cultural "Unmentionables"**

Perhaps the most interesting part of the research for me was looking into the way people communicate about the cultural 'dos and don'ts'. These covered topics such as toilet and bathroom use.

### **Toilet use**

Toilets around the world can differ immensely from the porcelain bowls we use in Australia to squat toilets, to holes in the ground. Not only do toilets differ in appearance, but they also differ in the ways they are used and how people use to clean themselves. If you have travelled you also might have experienced interesting moments in this regard. It can be very confusing for a student who has come from a country



where toilet use is different from toilet use in Australia. One homestay host related an embarrassing incident after she kept finding water all over the toilet floor.

*So I actually went with this, he was about 19 or 20. And I said to him, "We have to talk about the toilet in Australia, and all this water," I said, "are you standing in the toilet?"...*

*He said, "No, no, no, no." He was not standing in the toilet. He was standing on the toilet. I was killing myself. Don't laugh...*

*"OK, well, you have to stand here. You have to lift the seat. And it was just hysterical.*

Several hosts offered practical suggestions to help avoid embarrassing confrontations. Perhaps the most important suggestion was to explain to students how to use the toilet when they arrive.

### **The Bathroom**

Bathing also differs between cultures, depending on the ways the bathrooms are designed, the availability of clean water, the climate, etc. There were two main things that hosts found difficult with regard to bathroom use. Firstly, they were concerned about the idea of 'wet bathrooms'. Several hosts indicated they often found the bathroom floor covered with water. Some students are used to having bathrooms with drains in the middle of the floor allowing for extra drainage. On the other hand, it is less usual for Australian bathrooms to have extra drains.

Bathing rituals also differ. Some cultures value running water while they bathe, others stand in the bath and ladle the water over their bodies, while others (like in Australia) value a good 'soak'. Again probably the best solution to this is to explain to the students when they arrive about Australian bathrooms and bathing rituals. It might also be worth asking the students what they are used to.

The second concern about bathrooms involved the use of water. Australia is a relatively dry country with frequent droughts; therefore water conservation has a fairly high priority. On the other hand, some students come from very hot, wet countries where water conservation has less priority. Several hosts were concerned that their students have excessively long showers and/or very frequent showers (up to three or more per day). It is a good idea to communicate to your student the importance of water and conservation in Australia. Some hosts have also put timers on their hot water systems in order to limit time under the water.

### **Utilities**

A lot of hosts in both questionnaire responses and in focus group interviews complained about over use of utilities, such as water (as previously discussed), gas and electricity. A questionnaire respondent wrote,

*Students who leave lights on all night/electric blankets or heaters – take very long showers, don't realise that being wasteful or not security conscious makes life more difficult.*

There are several explanations for why students use a lot of electricity, gas, etc. Firstly, some international students come from countries with tropical climates. With this in mind they often feel the need for extra heat, especially during winter. Secondly, they are often not aware of the cost of excessive utility use. Students should be informed of the dangers of leaving blow heaters and electric blankets on during the night. Again it is important that you communicate about what the student is used to and what is done in your home.



Telephone usage also came up as an issue. Some hosts had difficulty with students making long phone calls to family and friends overseas and refusing to pay for the bill. One strategy to avoid difficulties could be to encourage the students to buy prepaid mobile phones. You might also have a second phone line at your house, which the student could rent directly from the telephone company.

### **Animals and Pets**

Because many students come from large cities and densely populated areas they have had little contact with animals as pets. Sometimes students request homes with no pets for religious reasons. Insects and spiders can also cause panic for some homestay students. While some students will communicate about their concerns with regard to animals, some students' sense of politeness hinders them from conveying their fears. One homestay host told the following story:

*So with all the students every year and I ask them a number of questions at the end of their stay, which they write up and ask them some of the memories. And it's interesting there that ... in writing what were some of the brave things that they've done. And it's often to do with things like "I lived with a spider in my room for three days." I think, "Why didn't you tell me. It was such a simple thing to say." And she had to get this off her chest. But spiders have been a taboo thing with a lot of the young Asian girls.*

### **Politeness and honesty**

In many Asian countries the idea of politeness and saving face is very important. For example it can be considered impolite to express your true feelings, especially if they might cause disagreement or argument, rather a person should say what others expect. Sometimes this sense of politeness can be interpreted by Australians as dishonesty, whereas it is possible the students are merely trying to please or to save face.

Some hosts described the students as 'stoic', and at times they related their frustration about students not communicating how they felt. A homestay host stated:

*...often the students are very stoic, or appear to be stoic and aren't ones for complaining if they're ill. I'd have to really observe them very carefully because they would hide some issues. If there's something that really doesn't appease them they will put up with a lot of difficulties and you really have to be on the ball. They're...I don't know if they do, that they culturally complain.*

Other hosts were concerned about students who would say one thing and then do another. It is important to develop a safe and understanding environment to help students learn to express what they really feel and open up lines of communication. On the other hand, if a homestay student is endangering their own safety, or the safety of the homestay household it is important to both communicate your concerns with the student and possibly report your concerns to the homestay organisation. If you are a student it is important to realise your hosts will probably expect you to let them know what you are thinking, even if you feel it is unimportant.

### **Communication**

Many homestay hosts found communication with their homestay students difficult at times. There are a few reasons for this. Firstly, some student's understanding of spoken English is not as good as their understanding of written English. Some students are uncomfortable asking questions or clarifying if they do not understand an instruction. Finally concepts such as humour and sarcasm are very culturally bound and they often take understanding of language and cultural innuendo to understand. One homestay host explained that she learnt to write the important things down.



*I mean I'd always say the house rules verbally, and he'd say, he said to me, "Can you please write them." So I thought, what a great idea, because it's like when you go to a motel, you read it on the back of the door. So I made a list of all the house rules, like you can smoke in your bedroom but you do not smoke in bed. Locking the security door at night. You know, dead locking again, when prior to 6pm if you're not coming home for dinner, tidy the bathroom after you. So there was about twenty, a list of twenty sentences. Did it up on the computer and had it laminated. Now that is pinned behind every student's door and they can read it and it's simple and it makes life a lot easier. If they, I say, I show them paper and I say, "Please read it. Whenever you don't understand, ask me." And it's clear from day 1 what is expected.*

If you have something important to communicate with a homestay student whose English is not very good yet it is important to remember to say things slowly and explicitly, and/or write them down. If you are a homestay student it is important to ask for clarification if you do not understand what your host is saying to you. It is important not to be embarrassed and to keep trying to communicate. Remember your host is there to help you.

### **Privacy and Personal Space**

Different cultures have different ideas about how much personal space and privacy an individual should have. The idea of modesty was mentioned several times by hosts. Some hosts were concerned about a student's lack of modesty explaining, "I had one boy who would get out of the bathroom and just have his towel around and go to his room". On the other hand, some hosts felt more restricted with other people in their house.

Another issue relating to cultural perceptions of modesty revolves around the idea that certain items of clothing (particularly female clothing) should not be seen. Some female students prefer to wash their own underwear. One questionnaire respondent wrote about her difficulties with "People who wash their socks/underwear in hand basin and hang it in their cupboard to dry."

Some suggestions to overcome difficulties relating to wet washing being hung in the students' bedrooms include providing students with plastic sheeting and a small clothes rack on which they can dry their own clothes. Also if the students are uncomfortable having their underwear washed by someone else, it might help to teach them how to operate the washing machine. It might also be important to discuss these issues so that you can come to mutually agreed upon arrangements.

Another difficulty can arise when the homestay hosts feel like their personal space has been invaded. Being a homestay host can be extremely demanding as you are expected to look after the physical needs of a student (such as food and shelter), you are often expected to help students with their language studies and you are expected to be their family and friend. Being all of these can sometimes be tiring. Hosts found the constant demand difficult especially when they felt tired and needed to withdraw. One host said,

*And it's much easier for them to ask [for help] than it is to go and look it up themselves, and one student I said to her "go and use your dictionary" and she'd come into my bedroom. I was on the computer. "What does this word mean?" And I just thought I have no space left to call my own.*

As a host or student it is important to maintain some space you can use as a retreat if you need it and you should also respect the other person's right to withdraw. Some hosts also indicated that their children would



often feel like their space has been invaded. It is also important to help your children find place to retreat to.

### **Homesickness**

Sometimes students show signs of extreme homesickness. Symptoms of homesickness can include being withdrawn, anti-social behaviour, depression, loss of appetite, etc. It is important to be understanding, to encourage students to do things which they are familiar with. Furthermore as a host you and/or your family might also experience some degree of frustration, anxiety, distrust, tiredness, etc due to someone else being part of your household. It is important to realise that because of the introduction of someone from a different culture into your family, you might also feel the effects of culture shock. You are not only in contact with someone from a different country you are in close contact with a person who has a very different family and social culture.

Over the course of this paper I have outlined the most prominent concerns of the homestay hosts I interviewed. You may encounter or may have already encountered some of the issues, and you have probably encountered different challenges than I have touched on. No matter what your experiences are it is not only important to recognise differences between cultures, but it is also necessary to recognise similarities. It is important to maintain open communication by asking questions and explaining everything, even things you consider to be simple, trivial or embarrassing. Homestay hosting should be a beneficial experience, where cultures can interact and learn from each other.